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TAGS: MARR NATO PREL PTER KU

SUBJECT: NATO ISTANBUL COOPERATION INITIATIVE MEETING IN KUWAIT

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

1.(U) The Government of Kuwait will host the next meeting of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) on December 12, 2006. The delegations will include the NATO Permanent Representatives, their representatives to the ICI Group and the four Gulf ICI members: Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates. Also attending will be Saudi Arabia, Oman and up to 200 academics, members of parliament and journalists.

2.(U) NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Sheffer and the Government of Kuwait are expected to sign two agreements at the meeting: a transit agreement for NATO personnel traveling to the NATO Training Mission-Iraq and their equipment; and an agreement for the protection of sensitive NATO information.

3.(U) At a news conference on December 2, Shaykh Thamer Ali Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah, Deputy Director of the Kuwait National Security Bureau, noted the Government of Kuwait's interest in NATO's expertise and multinational experience. Shaykh Thamer highlighted five types of NATO security training and assistance of particular interest to Kuwait: border security, counterterrorism, crisis management, joint military exercises and military education and training.

4.(C) COMMENT: These are longstanding NATO assistance requests from the GOK dating back to November, 2004. These requests were reiterated by the GOK at the March, 2005 ICI meeting in Rome and at a July, 2005 meeting of NATO member embassies in Kuwait where the GOK began to register frustration at the lack of response to its expression of interest in NATO training assistance. In the July, 2005 meeting, Shaykh Thamer noted that the GOK had sent seven delegations to Brussels since November, 2004 and had repeatedly expressed interest in specific types of training offered by NATO but had received no response from NATO. Despite this source of irritation, the fact of the meeting in Kuwait comes at a good time--signalling to Iran that the small Gulf states have big friends. End Comment.

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LEBARON